

Beginning Farmers of NH Aided by RBEG Grant

Outline of Need:

Rural areas in New Hampshire have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of people trying to develop small scale, value-added agricultural ventures over the past 10 years. Proof of this rise in entry level or beginning farmers was documented in the formation of the Beginner Farmers of NH network organized in 1997 with help from the North Country Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, Inc., and currently serving a membership base of over 200 small agricultural businesses. The commodities produced from these beginning farmers are quite diverse and essentially cover the gamut of agricultural enterprise. The tie that binds the beginners is their desire to increase the quality of life for their family by growing a successful agricultural business venture. Statistically, over 70% of the Beginner Farmer participants are women, many meet the low to moderate income standards, and 99% live in small rural communities of less than 5,000 population spread throughout the State of New Hampshire.

Agricultural service providers in NH have seen a 50% increase in the number of requests for business development assistance from beginning farmers across the state. 2004 surveys conducted by the Beginner Farmers of NH network indicated a high priority for technical assistance that would help beginning farmers draft business plans to launch or expand small agricultural businesses.

How RD Helped:

USDA Rural Development awarded the North Country Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, Inc. a \$155,440 Rural Business Enterprise Grant in September 2004 to provide technical assistance to the participating membership of Beginner Farmers of NH. Known as the "NH Agricultural Innovation Program," and working in collaboration with the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food, the University of NH Cooperative Extension, NH Farm Bureau Federation, the Southern NH Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, Inc., and the NH Small Business Development Center, the project goals were to develop Business Assistance Teams that would provide on-going 1:1 training for beginning farmers to help them develop a business plan over the first year, provide follow-up assistance for implementation over the course of the second year, and to encourage participants to serve as mentors for other beginner farmers thereafter. The technical assistance targets start-up, entry level, transitioning and expanding agricultural operations in rural areas throughout NH with fewer than 5 owners/employees and annual gross revenues of less than \$200,000. The project objective was to nurture the expansion of small scale agriculture in NH to expand the industry and to create a greater critical mass and supportive infrastructure.

Result:

In response to the project solicitation for applications, some 40 farm operations applied, and 18 diverse farms from around NH were selected to receive intensive support from teams of specialists in management, finance, marketing and other fields tailored to individual farm needs. The Business Assistance Teams typically include two to four experts drawn from both public and private sectors. Each farm draws up its own business plan with help from its team members and continues working with the team for about 18-24 months. All participants are expected to mentor other farmers needing business planning assistance in the future. Due to the rigorous team approach, two participating farms have already made significant changes in the type of operation they will pursue, and many have moved from startup mode to an operation with a clear strategy for growth and success. Development of the business plans is scheduled to conclude by September 2006 for all participants, then farms will begin

the implementation and monitoring stage of the project, and mentor services will be established with each farm to assist other farms in the future. Expected project outcomes include up to 18 new or expanded agricultural business ventures in rural NH with each farm agreeing to mentor at least one additional beginning farmer through the business development process, with publication of a booklet of business plan success stories by December 2007.



CHAR-BELLE FARM
CERTIFIED ORGANIC VEGETABLE GROWER AND HYDROPONIC PRODUCTION
Receiving technical assistance from North Country Resource Conservation and Development
Area Council, Inc, with help of a \$155,440 Rural Business Enterprise Grant